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SUBJECT: Pan-African Parliamentary Delegation Calls on Ambassador

Ref: Niamey 684

11. (SBU) Summary: On September 18, four members of an African Union (AU) Pan-African Parliamentary delegation called on Ambassador Allen, and stated that Niger's political opposition should accept the status quo and negotiate with President Tandja for a way forward that reflects their objectives. Not doing so, they believed, would likely result in further deterioration of the political situation. While the AU's decision to send a delegation to Niger was a positive step, it is clear that the visit will not be helpful in moving beyond the current impasse. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), Political Officer (PolOff) and locally engaged staff (LES) Political Specialist also participated in the meeting. End summary.

Delegation Meets with Several Political Figures/Groups

12. (SBU) On September 18, a delegation from the AU Pan-African Parliament met with Ambassador Allen, DCM, PolOff and LES Pol Specialist. The delegation opened the meeting by informing the Ambassador of their vast agenda from the past week that included meetings with President Tandja, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chadian Ambassador (as dean of the diplomatic corps), the European Commission Head of Delegation, the National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties, the High Council of Communications, several opposition political parties, the media, and civil society organizations. They indicated that their time, however, did not permit meetings with other foreign missions, including the French and Nigerian Embassies. The AU delegation members were:

- Sawadogo Lassane, Chief of Delegation (Burkina Faso);
- Roger Nkodo Dang (Cameroon);
- Hassane Ahmed (Ethiopia); and
- Datrinade Marina, Recorder (South Africa).

Delegation Said GON and Opposition Open to Dialogue

13. (SBU) Delegation members pointed out that throughout their meetings it came to their attention that there is a widening divergence among the political class, with growing differences between those who supported President Tandja and the new constitution, and those who did not. The delegation considered opposition support for the 5th Republic and the 1999 constitution unrealistic, and suggested that divisive elections could be avoided if the political opposition seized President Tandja's opening for dialogue. According to the delegation, the West needed to "convince the opposition of reality."

14. (SBU) The members added that one objective not met was to meet with the current Constitutional Court members, in hopes of gaining

insight into whether the slated October legislative elections had to take place on October 20 versus a later date. Delegation members believe that the differences that exist between supporters of the new constitution and opponents will continue to widen, both before and after the legislative elections. They added that they are worried that upcoming legislative elections will deepen the divide in Niger. When asked whether the delegation had met with any of the former (dissolved) Constitutional Court members, the delegation responded it had not done so.

National Forum Could Determine New Constitution

15. (SBU) The delegation reported that President Tandja and the Prime Minister were very open, with discussion taking place on all topics except rolling back the 6th Republic. The delegation stated it similarly had the same level of open dialogue with opposition politicians. The delegation asserted that the majority of Nigeriens did not like the former (1999) constitution because it was not adapted to the "realities of today's Niger," although no elaboration was offered. The delegation stated that a national forum could be held, where both sides could state their position and eventually reach consensus on the terms and conditions of accepting a new constitution. In the meantime, President Tandja would remain in power during a three-year transitional period.

Both Sides Will Need To Make Concessions

16. (SBU) Delegation members emphasized that both sides (the GON and opposition) must accept the impossibility of obtaining one hundred percent (100%) of what they seek, that "There will have to be give and take in this process." The delegation believed that the opposition should accept the current situation, and be willing to

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negotiate and compromise on remaining issues, particularly regarding the October 20 National Assembly elections. They also stated that the opposition admitted willingness to back down from their current political stance and engage in dialogue with the GON without pre-conditions.

Ethiopian Parliamentarian Cites Two Possible Scenarios

17. (SBU) Citing past conflict in Ethiopia, Hassane Ahmed expressed hope that the ongoing political tension in Niger could eventually be resolved in a similar fashion. He stated that the most favorable outcome would be for efforts to propel both sides together to promote a "give and take" resolution of political differences. A part of this could involve President Tandja agreeing to postpone legislative elections for the opposition's accepting the reality of the 6th Republic. He added that the opposition had made a mistake when it boycotted the referendum, and that now it would not be fair to citizens to claim subsequent elections unfair.

18. (SBU) In what he coined as an "unfavorable" situation, Ahmed said that the Nigerien opposition could calculate to resist the government by confronting it on the streets in hopes of disrupting and eventually isolating it. Opposition members could push for civil disobedience and stoke unrest, and gamble that the GON's support would dwindle over time. Both sides "over-estimate the other," he observed, which is a "recipe for battle."

19. (SBU) Ahmed believes the opposition should agree to allow President Tandja to stay in office for the next three years, with the hope of delaying legislative elections as well as the implementation date for the new constitution. When pressed by Ambassador Allen on how this would be different from the opposition's current situation, Ahmed admitted that the opposition would not stand to gain by doing so. The Ambassador questioned why President Tandja, if he is certain of "overwhelming support from the people", insists on a three-year extension to his mandate, as opposed to competing in Presidential elections against any challengers. The delegation seemed to have no response to that question.

Comment:

¶10. (SBU) Although the AU's decision to send a delegation to Niger was a good demonstration of continental leadership and engagement, the delegation members did not seem to have a firm grasp on the current political situation in Niger. The delegation stated that their first meeting was with President Tandja and that the absence of an out-brief with him would not permit them to probe him on issues brought up in subsequent meetings with other stakeholders (e.g., human rights groups, private media) throughout the week. Regrettably, they appeared all too ready to accept recent political developments as givens, and to insist that the political opposition do likewise, while seeking meetings with President Tandja to pursue their remaining objectives. They seemed to see dialogue as an end, rather than a means. The delegation will eventually submit a report to the AU; however, we do not expect realistic recommendations to result.

Allen